

Minutes from Aging in Community Committee

October 10, 2023

9:30 am-11:30 am

“Affordable Housing for Seniors Session #2 –
A County Perspective on Policies, Programs, and Challenges”

Attendance: Betsy Carrier, Mary Sweeney, Norman Goldstein, David Engel, Barbara Selter, Linda Bergofsky, Laurie Pross

Staff: Gemena Murchison, Pazit Aviv

1. Welcome and Introductions of the two new commissioners. Norman Goldstein indicated that his son was very involved with the housing project on Viers Mill and University that will have 200+ low-income units. His son could speak to our committee and share information about the long process for approvals.
2. Review and Approval of September 12, 2023, minutes. Mary moved to approve the minutes from September 12, David seconded.

Speakers: Somer Cross, Jose Ortiz, Todd Dorien

Meeting Overview –Mary Sweeney

This was the second in a series of sessions on Affordable Senior Housing in MoCo, that will serve to educate the committee on the issues surrounding this important topic. This session was intended to feature information on County policies and programs intended to enable more affordable housing for older adults. Sommer Cross, with the Montgomery County Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs, had a detailed presentation that presented information about Senior Housing needs in Montgomery County and some proposals that are being considered.

By way of background, she referenced a 2018 detailed study of the demographics and housing needs of seniors in Montgomery County, including that 30% of the population is over 55 years old, and 17% 65+. In the County 66% of the population are homeowners. There is a higher percentage of homeowners in older age cohort and they have also lived in their homes longer. The median income for all county residents was \$112,854 but was \$92,882 for those over 65.

Given the demographics this study found that:

- Housing affordability is a challenge for many older adults in Montgomery County.
- The oldest seniors in Montgomery County face the greatest challenges and their numbers are growing.

- Over the next 25 years, the County’s older adult population will be substantially larger than it is today, suggesting significantly growing housing and service needs for an aging population.
- The vast majority of older adults in Montgomery County would like to age in place.
- 40% of older adult households live in housing units that are at least 45 years old.
- 80% live in housing that is at least 25 years old.

To accommodate some of these needs the County has put several programs in place:

- Home Share: homeowners offer spare rooms or ADU to rent. With options to assist around the house for reduced rent
- Design for Life State and County real estate tax credit for accessibility repairs/renovations Home
- Accessibility Rehabilitation Program (DHCA) Renovate home to provide accessibility improvements and/or fall prevention system installations.
- Weatherization Energy Improvements (DHCA).
- Replace appliances / systems that are 10+ years old with more energy efficient models for low-income households.
- Villages (HHS) Local, volunteer-led, grassroots organizations to support community members who choose to age-in-place.

Somer described that housing and service needs for seniors are on a continuum from conventional multifamily, active adult, independent living, assisted living, memory care to skilled nursing. Each progressive level of service has additional service needs. The market rates for these different types of housing ranges from CCRC: \$400,000+ buy in with monthly fees of at least \$3,500; assisted living \$6,500-\$9,000; and memory care \$11,000 per month. There are limited subsidies available, they include: for remaining at home a federal waiver can be available for skilled nursing at home; there are no subsidies for independent living, assisted living some seniors receive assisted living subsidies for Medicaid recipients, and skilled nursing care for Medicare and Medicaid patients.

There is a County workgroup exploring a subsidy program by housing type. They are looking into creating a whole separate affordable senior provision that would be a new section of code. They anticipate that they will report out in 2024. It would consolidate all senior housing types. Consideration would be given to providing affordable units or an equivalent, create a formula to set affordable rent + service fee, allow households to pay higher percentage of income, and to consider assets in making determinations.

Norman asked how many dollars would be available. Could there be a mandate for all new developments to include affordable housing.

There was a discussion about whether there was adequate information for “ordinary” citizens to understand availability and access to low- and middle-income housing.

- Todd Dorien from Victory Housing introduced himself. He is relatively new to Victory Housing, but has experience in all the housing sectors. He described that Victory Housing

is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization affiliated with the archdiocese of Washington. Victory has 37 communities with 2,800 beds. Five of them are in Montgomery County. They are small, assisted living facilities with 30-45 rooms each and a total of 175 rooms.

- Most of these facilities were developed in the 1990's with the most recent one being Grace House, developed in 2006. To make these facilities affordable Victory needs an inexpensive lease for the land. Financing includes either free land, loan or debt from the County. The pricing for their assisted living facilities is @\$6,500 per month which is less than for-profit facilities. Half of their units are occupied by residents who need some type of financial subsidies.
- Remarks by Jose Ortiz, Chief of Staff for Councilmember Fani Gonzalez. Jose said that the Councilmember is very concerned with the increasing number of elderly and their health care and housing needs. She is eager for Somer to complete her study. He stated there is a need for big developers to help address the housing problem.

Discussion:

- Different models:
 - There was a discussion of different models to create low-income housing. Models in South Carolina and Washington DC were described. In South Carolina there is the Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO). At least 15% of their program funds must be set aside for development of affordable housing.
 - In Washington DC the services provided in assisted living facilities can be paid for by Medicaid. Then the housing portion of the fee can be partially covered by Social Security payments. Maryland does not have a similar funding model. Maryland needs to consider a similar model.
- David Engel is on the County's affordable housing workgroup and he described some of the issues under consideration:
 - Change in what qualifies as affordable
 - Larger number of seniors in the lower income affordable band
 - Need to consider assets when making eligibility determinations
- Questions came up about the number of problems and delays with the facility on Randolph Road. It was suggested that the County Executive should make the process simpler.
- A number of questions were raised concerning where is there available land that can be used for affordable housing? Can more County owned property be released for development? What types of housing is going to be developed along the Purple Line? Can more building take place on church property?
- What is happening at the White Flint property? Is this property available?
- Would it be helpful to have a factsheet on housing options? As part of the materials recently put together by the Health & Wellness Committee, David developed a fact sheet on housing, more discussion should be directed toward dissemination of that fact sheet.

- Norman- urged the committee not to do endless study of the issues without having an advocacy position and action plan with a timetable.
- Pazit urged the Committee to be systematic as housing is a complex multifaceted process. Considerations should include land use among the issues.
- Linda raised concerns of no new construction in the agricultural reserve. Also, any housing recommendations must be grounded in equity.
- Questions were raised about the role of developers.

Pazit provided an update on the hub and spoke model which is now referred to as “The Consortium”. It has been incorporated in the State of Maryland, and they completed and submitted its 501c3 application to the IRS. They have elected their first Board of Directors. They are in the process of developing a memorandum of understanding between the Consortium and its fiscal sponsor Little Falls Village, as well as between the Consortium and its member villages. They are Fundraising and have received a \$10,000 grant to support hiring an outreach manager to begin to work with underserved communities. They are waiting to hear about other grants they have submitted.

Possible speakers on the housing topic for November 2023 AIC Meeting:

- Faith based community role in housing.
- Norman Goldstein’s son to discuss the implementation and status of the Randolph Road project.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:15